Down among the dead The Times Level The team at Core Design in Derby continues to work around the clock to complete our unlause Times lavel

Searching through the archives of The Times, Lara Croft has discovered a notebook which she hopes will lead her to the greatest archaeological discovery since the tomb of Tutankhamun was found. But she needs help - and in the latest episode by ERICA WAGNER, she heads off to the British Museum for expert advice...

Walking down Museum Street, past the little Italian cafes and souvenir shops, Lara checked her watch and patted her pocket, making sure the notebook was still safe. Six o'clock on an autumn day and already it was nearly dark; Lara's breath plumed in front of her and drifted off like hope. Hope! Was it crazy to think she was on to something? Well, she'd soon see.

The museum was closing; a security guard stopped her at the entrance. But she told him she had an appointment, and he let her through. She walked against the tide of visitors leaving the columned entrance of the building, past the scaffolding that still marred its face, the cranes that loomed in the darkness like prehistoric creatures.

Inside a guard led her though long passageways and empty galleries. She caught a glimpse of the Elgin marbles, glowing moon-blue in the half dark; stone faces cast their blank looks on her. The guard left her in a narrow corridor, in front of a

wooden door. She knocked. "One moment, please!" A muffled shout in the American accent she'd heard on the telephone. A scuffling; the sound, she guessed from some familiarity with it, of hasty tidying. And then the door swung open.

"Miss Croft, I presume! How d'you do? Alvin Blackmore, pleased to meet you."

Dr Alvin Blackmore III put out a meaty hand, which she took, and he pumped hers heartily, squeezing her knuckles rather harder than she would have liked. He towered over her - he must have been 6'4" - and though she guessed he was in his mid-sixties he was powerfully built, broad across the chest and shoulders: a vividly striped expanse of costly Egyptian cotton was at her eye level; just above, his thick neck was decorated with a floppy bow tie. His hair was quite white but his cheeks were ruddy; she could easily imagine him, decades ago, star quarterback at - Yale, it looked like, when she peered over his shoulder at the diplomas hanging on the wall behind him. "Come in, come in," he said. "Do have a seat."

A great oak desk took up one corner of the small room, otherwise." which was mostly filled with filing cabinets and a couple of small tables covered with papers; piles of them weighted down, she saw, with small alabaster and granite figures. One was carved, she saw, with a winsome baboon's face,

appropriately enough. Blackmore cleared the last scrap of paper from the seat he had indicated. "May I take your coat?" he offered.

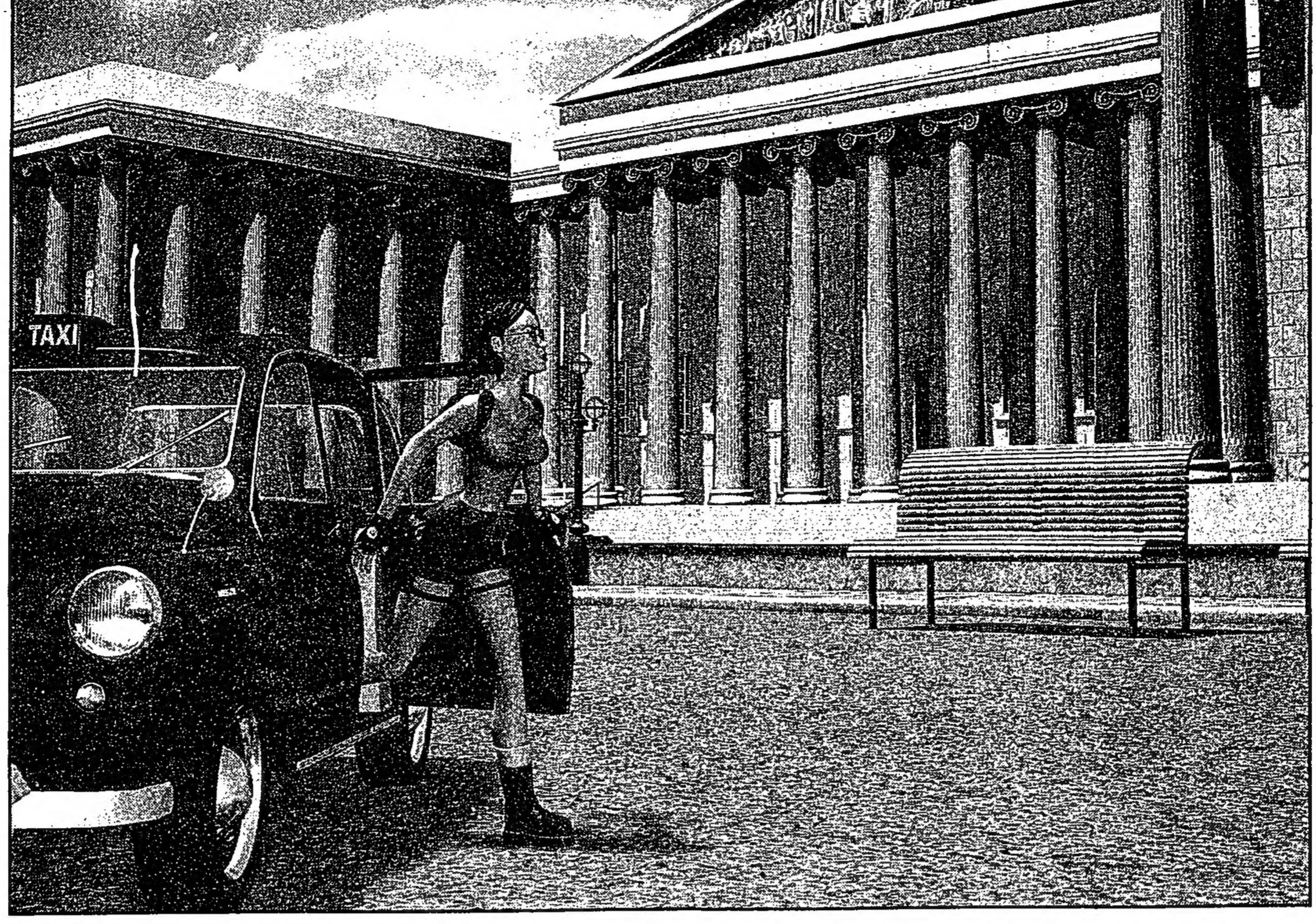
"I'm fine, thanks," Lara said. "Thanks for seeing me." "Well, any friend of Professor Gilbert's is a friend of mine," he laughed. "Now," he said, seating himself on the other side of his desk. "This was something about a notebook?"

Lara reached into her jacket and pulled out the little paper book. She handed it over to him and watched as he began to leaf through the pages. "Interesting," he said, almost to himself. "Carter's handwriting." He looked up at her, raised an eyebrow. "Provenance?" he asked.

"I can't say." She looked him straight in the eye. He shook his head. "Well, well, well." He stared at her, not the way men often did: what he was appraising, she was sure, was above her neck. "Gilbert said there was something a bit - piratical about you." He closed the book. "But strictly speaking, I shouldn't even be looking at this. I could get into some pretty hot water; not to mention what would happen to

you, my dear." He smiled. authentic, but I wanted to show it to someone else. I think there might be - directions. He talks about Tutankhamun's widow, Ankhesenamun; she was only 25 when he died and no one knows where she's buried. He seems to think that her tomb might hold some secret, some - power. He talks about a jewel that can confer eternal life - real eternal life, not the afterlife of Egyptian mythology. I know it sounds mad, but I don't think it is. I need help to work this out, though. Help

from someone I could trust." "You don't strike me as the trusting type."



"Sometimes I have to be," Lara said. "But I get rather cross when that trust is betrayed."

"Point taken." He sat back and looked out the window. "I'd like to have a closer look at this." He looked at his watch. "Perhaps we might meet again tomorrow." "You get to keep the book?"

"I don't see how I'd be able to have a closer look Lara shifted in her seat. She was uncomfortable. She hadn't

made a copy of the notebook; there hadn't been time. "Look," Blackmore said. He got up from his desk and picked up one of the little statues he'd been using as a paperweight. About five inches high and delicately carved, it was an image of Isis, protectress of the dead; the moon enhorned above her head and her son, Horus, cradled in her lap. He gave it to Lara. The stone was cool and smooth. "Why don't

you hang on to that? Call it security." She turned it over in her hand. It seemed wise to her; she could feel its antiquity. She wondered what it had seen. "I guess you don't get these from the museum shop," she said. Blackmore chuckled, and put a hand on her shoulder. "You could say not," he said. "So - shall we say tomorrow? Eleven

o'clock? I'll make us some Turkish coffee, how's that?" "That would be fine," Lara said. "I'll look forward to that." He slipped the notebook back into the top pocket of his jacket. He shook her hand again, just as firmly. "Pleasure doing business with you, Miss Croft," he said. "I think this

might be a very fruitful association." "Let's hope so," Lara said. She told him she could find her own way out, and as she left, made a point to walk all through the silent Egyptian galleries, looking over her shoulder before brushing her fingers against the incised surface the Rosetta Stone. The "It's about another tomb," Lara said. "I'm pretty sure it's little Isis was heavy in her pocket. She stopped in front of a Blackmore's office was just next door... life-size statue, seated, a woman with a lion's head: Sakhmet, the goddess who brought destruction to the enemies of the Sun god, Re. In the statue's lap someone had left a loose bouquet of flowers, white fresias and purple irises. The offering made the statue come alive, somehow; the hairs rose on the back of Lara's neck and she found herself unwilling to meet its stone gaze. She hurried out of the empty museum and

into the yellow London night. It was only when she got home that she realised the last page of the notebook had come loose from its bindings and

had remained in her pocket. Well, it didn't matter. She could show it to Blackmore in the morning.

It was a quarter to eleven when she arrived at the museum the next day, which was bright, with high, scudding clouds. She ran up the stone steps and headed towards Blackmore's office; a guard stopped her as she was about to go beyond the sign that said 'Staff Only'. "I have an appointment with Dr Blackmore," she said.

"Right," said the guard, a woman, staring at her beadily. "This way." She led Lara not to Dr Blackmore's office - the door was shut - but just beyond it, to another door, which she struck with her knuckles and then pushed open. "Someone for Dr Blackmore," she said. A woman got up from behind a desk and she and Lara

looked at each other. "I'm Lara Croft," she said. "I'm here to see Dr Blackmore. Is there a problem?" The woman nodded, and to Lara's astonishment, she saw a

tear trickle down her cheek. Lara sat behind the woman's desk, a cup of tea cooling in

front her. A heart attack? How could he have had a heart attack? He looked so healthy! Frances Brock - that was the woman's name, she was an assistant curator of some sort, Lara gathered - had broken it to her as gently as possible, but still, Lara was stunned. In the office? At home? Lara had asked; at home, apparently; he'd managed to dial for an ambulance but was dead by the time it reached the hospital. Just as Brock had told her this, the phone had rung. She picked it up, nodded a few times, looking even more anxious, and then hung up. "Will you excuse me a moment?" And she dashed out of the office.

Well, this was a rotten piece of luck. Lara rose, and paced the room. She poked her head around the door. No sign of anyone. She listened. Nothing. No tap tap of heels.

Without further thought, Lara left Brock's office and tried Blackmore's door. Unlocked. In she slipped.

The next instalment of Down among the Dead will appear on Saturday December 11.

starring Lara Croft. It will also introduce an entirely new character to computer gaming - our own editor, Peter Stothard.

The level being written especially for Times readers is set in and around the newspaper. It starts with Peter Stothard asking Lara to see him - to tell her of a hush-hush find in Egypt and an unfolding mystery. Lara soon gets to work for us - checking out information in our archives then embarking on the dangerous mission.

To complete the level she must get to grips with plenty of weapons and tools. Then she will have to solve specific puzzles while dodging traps and some chilling enemies - like scarab beetles, bats, mummies and skeletons.

Our level will be ready on December 21. It will be available to everyone who wants to download it via our website. Even if you are not connected to the internet you can run the collectible Times level on your PC because we are printing up a limited number of CD-Roms. We will also keep you posted about how you can order the disc in the days before Christmas.

THE TIMES LARA CROFT OFFICER

LIMITED EDITION LARA CROFT WATCH

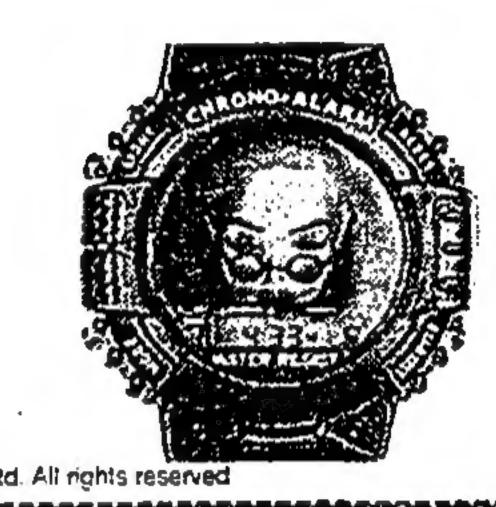
LARAC OFFICIAL LARA CROFT DIGITAL WATCH FROM HER LATEST COLLECTION

ETG. GG

BLACK MATT PLASTIC AND INCLUDES 12/24 HOUR, DAY AND DATE, LIGHT, STOP

WATCH.

SUPPLIED IN CLEAR PLASTIC CARRY CASE.



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1 enclose a cheque/PO(s) (NO CASH) made The Times Lara Croft Offer, PO Box 330, Wetherby, The Times Lara Croft Watch Offer FT963 West Yorkshire LS23 7XS. Write name and address on back of cheques

FOR ORDERS PLEASE CALL 0870 1 217217

SECURE ONLINE ORDERING: WWW.TIMES-ESHOP.CO.UK

FOR THIS AND OTHER OFFERS

Orders received before December 10th

FAMILY HOLDAYS TO EGYPT TO BE WON

From now until the New Year, The Times, Eidos and Microsoft are giving you the chance to win some fantastic prizes. But there is a catch - you have to solve Lara's seven riddles. The first was published last week but will be printed again later this month. Each individual riddle offers the chance to win Lara Croft merchandise. Solving all seven gives the chance to win a Goldenjoy Holidays family trip to Egypt. The next riddie appears next Saturday.

USING THE TIMES ROSETTA STONE (RIGHT) AS A KEY, TRANSLATE AND RE-ARRANGE THE PIECES OF THE SMASHED TABLET BELOW TO FIT THE BLANK GRID (WE HAVE ALREADY INSERTED FOUR BLOCKS TO GET YOU STARTED). EACH PIECE CONTAINS THREE ELEMENTS -HIEROGLYPHS OR SPACES. SOLVE THE RIDDLE. WHEN YOU HAVE THE ANSWER, RING THE COMPETITION HOTLINE, LEAVING THE ANSWER, YOUR NAME, ADDRESS AND DAYTIME TELEPHONE NUMBER. ENTRIES MAY ALSO BE MADE VIA WWW.THE-TIMES.CO.UK/LARA/. CLUES MAY BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE AND AT WWW.MICROSOFT.COM/UK/ENCARTA/

PLAY ON OUR WEBSITE www.the-times.co.uk/lara/



COMPETITION HOTLINE 09015624162

ALL CALLS COST 60P A MINUTE

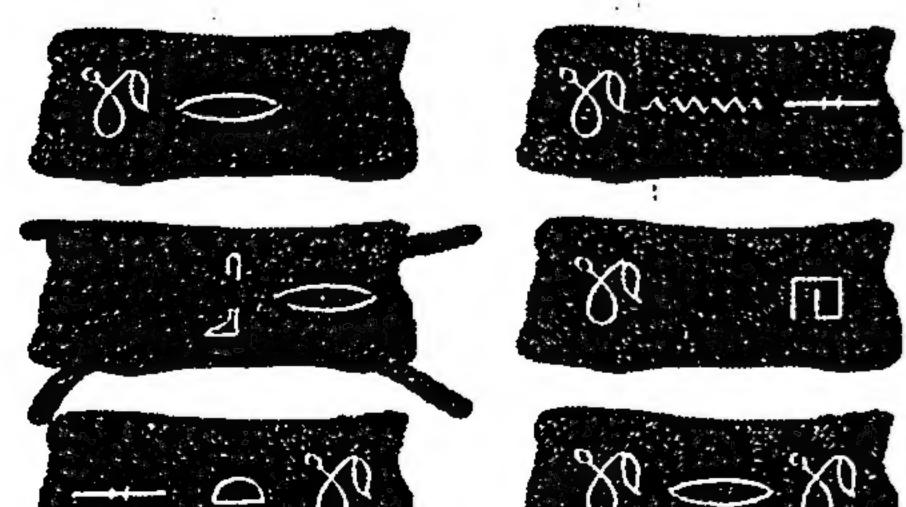
LINES FOR THIS WEEK CLOSE MIDNIGHT DECEMBER 10

Who am!?

PRIZES:

ONE WEEKLY FIRST PRIZE:

Reference Suite 2000



6 ft Lara Model, Lara Padded team Jacket,

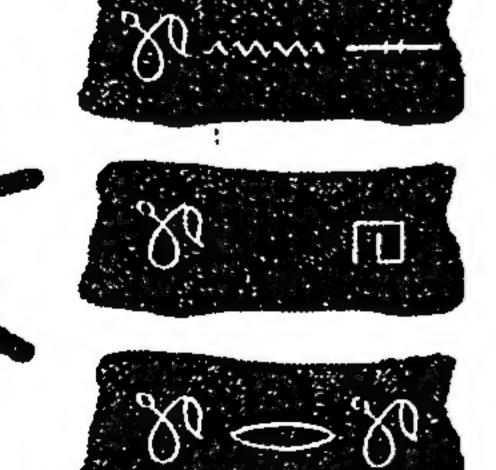
Tomb Raider games 1, 2, 3 and 4, exclusive

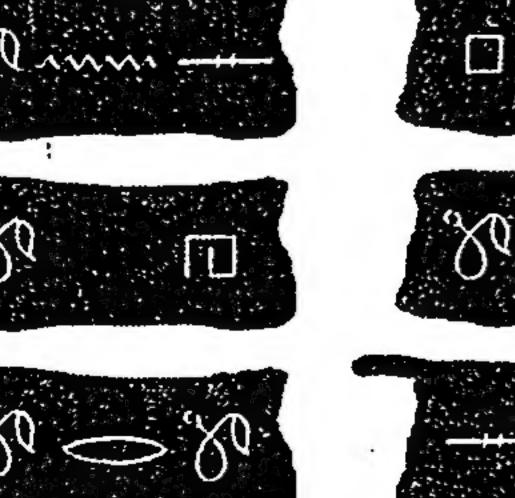
watch, Lara Ladies watch, Lara wallet, Lara

Back pack, Lara Towel, Lara CD Case, Lara

Mousemat, one copy of Microsoft Encarta

picture signed by team, Lara Analogue







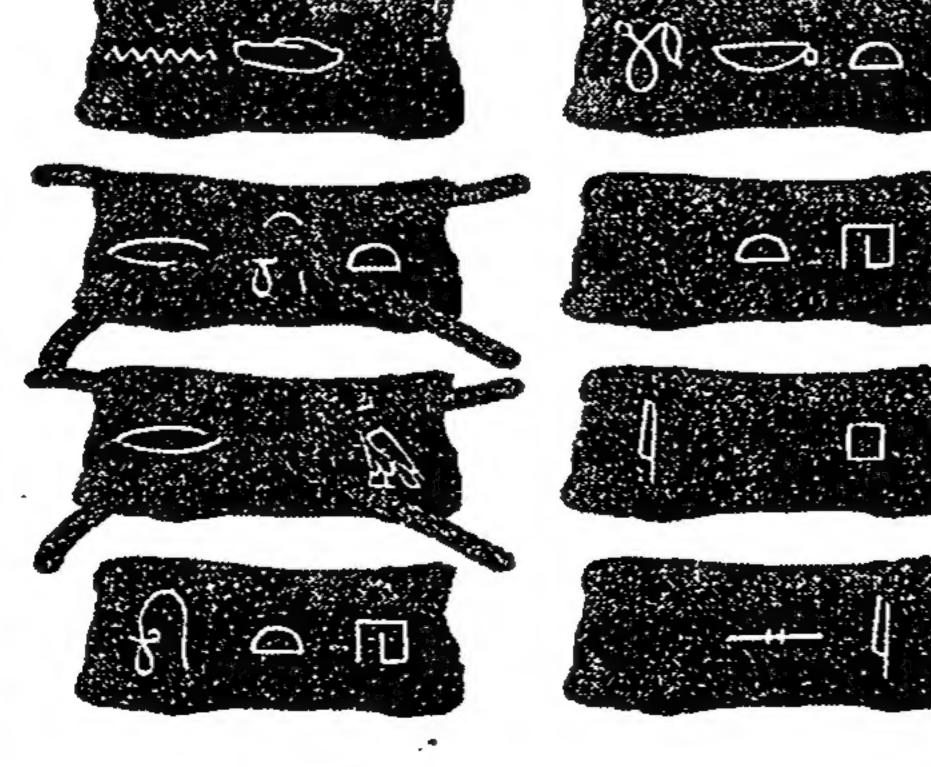
Tomb Raider games 1, 2, 3 and 4, Lara

Zip fleece, Lara Analogue watch, Lara

Desk Statue, Lara Wallet, Bath Towel, Half

Ladies watch, Lara T Shirt, Lara Mousemat,

ONE WEEKLY SECOND PRIZE:





wallet, Lara Bobble hat, Lara Polo shirt. Lara Mousemat EIGHTY WEEKLY FOURTH PRIZES:

Lara desk statue, Lara Bath towel, Lara

FOUR WEEKLY THIRD PRIZES:

one copy of Microsoft Encarta Reference Lara T-shirt, Lara Key Fob Suite 2000 Normal Times Newspapers competition rules apply. Merchandise may vary at our discretion.



WE HAVE TEAMED UP WITH GOLDENJOY HOLIDAYS, ONE OF THE LEADING TOUR OPERATORS FOR EGYPT AND THE RED SEA, TO OFFER TIMES READERS UP TO 25 PER CENT (PLUS A FURTHER TEN PER CENT FOR CHILDREN) OFF THE FOLLOWING HOLIDAYS

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■ Learn-to-dive course for five days just £190 per person. Other diving packages are available on request ● Prices are based on two people sharing a twin room. Single supplements and children's discounts are available on request. Standard Goldenjoy Holidays booking conditions apply. Offer is subject to availability. This holiday is operated by Goldenjoy Holidays plc, a company independent of Times Newspapers Ltd Abta V2734 Atol 2544

CHANGINGTIMES

LARA'S PRIZES BROUGHT

MICROSOIT

